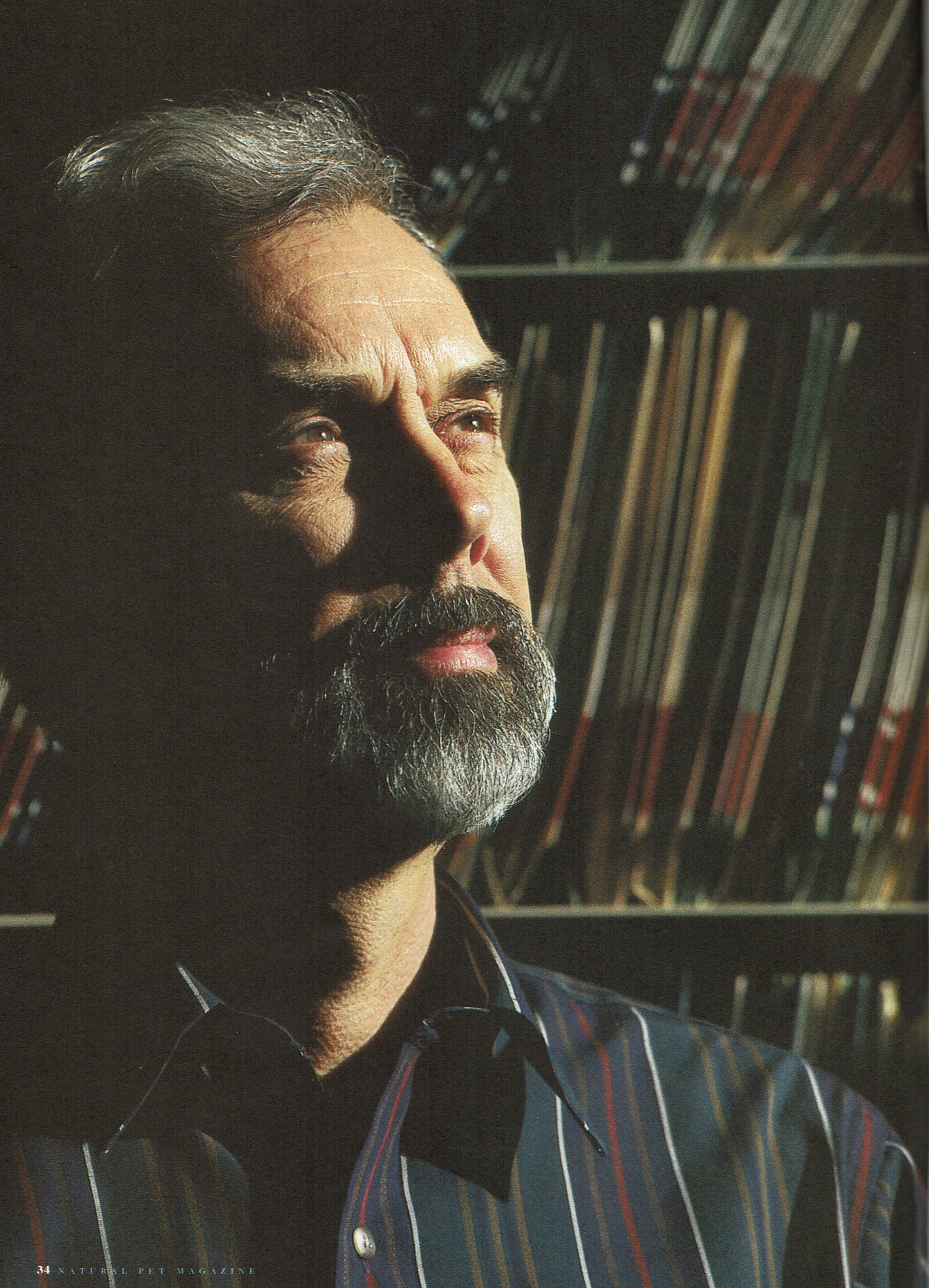


Going for the Cure

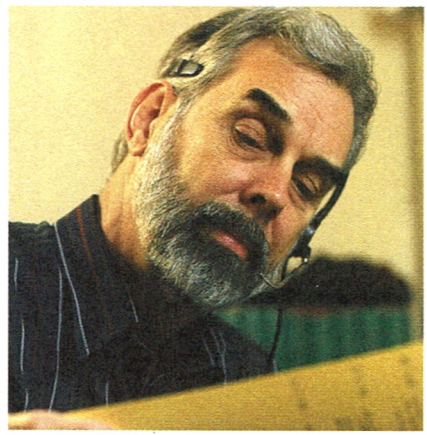
By Marion Lane ■ Photos by Andy Nelson

Dr. Richard Pitcairn, a pioneer in veterinary homeopathy, cures disease with an often controversial healing philosophy.

"The goal of homeopathy is cure" says Richard Pitcairn carefully, as if anticipating protest. "But since cure is not usually considered to be something that medicine can do, the term is a little bit suspect." The calm, quiet voice sounds just the way you'd expect a pioneering veterinary homeopath to sound. Dr. Pitcairn then points out that in human medicine it is against the law for a doctor to advertize that he can cure disease. "By definition that's quackery," Pitcairn says with some amount of wonder before shifting to a brisker tone, "but ever since Samuel Hahnemann formulated homeopathic medicine 200 years ago, its goal has been to cure disease, which means to eliminate the disease completely and restore the body to a state of health." ■ Dr. Pitcairn makes an important distinction between the idea of "cure" as Hahnemann pursued it, and as many traditional practitioners—both veterinary and human—implicitly do. "They don't state it this way," he says, "but their goal in treatment seems to be to relieve or suppress the symptoms of the disease, and they're satisfied with that." According to Pitcairn, it's relatively easy to relieve symptoms with powerful drugs and surgery. The effects are immediate and dramatic. Unfortunately, the underlying disease is still there. Pitcairn believes that homeopathy provides the conceptual framework to actually cure disease and within that framework, it is unethical to just relieve symptoms. "Here's an analogy," he offers. ■ "Imagine if a gardener were to hack off a weed at the ground level, leaving the roots behind. Things might look better for a time, but you can be sure that the weed would poke its head up again—maybe bigger than before." ■ If the goal of homeopathy is cure, does that mean that all conditions that are treated homeopathically can be cured? No, it doesn't. "Not all patients can be helped," Dr. Pitcairn writes in the preface to the second edition of *Complete Guide to Natural Health*, co-authored with his wife, Susan Hubble Pitcairn. "It depends on how much damage has been done." ■ The damage Dr. Pitcairn is referring to is all-inclusive and, unfortunately, close to all-pervasive in our damaged ecosystem. It goes beyond the damage caused by the disease process itself and beyond the bad luck of bad genes. It includes the damage done by poor

nutrition, pollution, inadequate exercise and stressful living conditions. Perhaps most unfortunately, it includes many well-intended, but nevertheless harmful, attempts to treat the patient with the tools of traditional veterinary medicine: powerful drugs, annual vaccinations, exploratory surgery and other invasive diagnostic tests and treatment protocols.

Pitcairn is quick to point out that alternative veterinary medicine, including homeopathy, can do damage too if practiced improperly. Herbs strong enough to affect the central nervous system, for instance, can make it difficult or impossible for the patient to respond to proper homeopathic remedies. The remedies themselves, if prescribed at too high a potency or frequency, or incorrectly prescribed, may not only prevent the desired response but suppress symptoms or cause side-effects in the same way as powerful traditional drugs. So Dr. Pitcairn is not one to profess that homeopathy is invariably safe and gentle just because it is natural. It must be practiced with care, skill and the benefit of extended study and experience.



Dr. Pitcairn does much of his work via telephone consultations.

TWO CATEGORIES OF PROBLEMS

In just the past few years, homeopathy has begun to be thought of as a regimen of self-help. Drug stores and health food stores are carrying over-the-counter homeopathic remedies. Weekend students are encouraged to buy a few books and start treating themselves and their animals. Dr. Pitcairn feels the need to distinguish between two different categories of health problems: acute illness and chronic disease.

Acute illness is any sudden assault on the body, he explains. The assault could be being hit by a car. It could be a wound. It could be poisoning or a cold or even a deadly contagious disease such as rabies. Acute conditons are relatively easy to treat homeopathically. A single remedy is used; for instance, Arnica is administered in the case of an injury. When the injury has healed, you are finished. In a sense, almost anyone can prescribe for acute conditions. Many acute conditions, even spectacular ones such as being hit by a car or a bad fall, will actually heal without any intervention at all. Unvaccinated animals that are very healthy to begin with may spontaneously recover from serious contagious diseases.

Chronic disease, however, is by its nature persistent. It tends to worsen over time and rarely does an animal recover on its own. Chronic diseases, which include allergies, arthritis, immune system problems, hypothyroidism, inflammatory bowel disease and bladder infections, are complicated and difficult to treat. They require a patient, step-by-step approach over a period of time, using a series of related remedies. Selecting the right remedies out of the thousands that are available is not easy; it requires years of study.

Curing chronic disease also requires a long-term commitment from the practitioner and pet owner. Just as it takes time to become sick, with a gradual accumulation of symptoms and loss of health and fitness, it takes time to reverse the process and rebuild vitality. Chronic disease does not lend itself to dramatic cures as do some of the so-called wonder drugs. In fact, powerful drugs, such as vaccinations, can actually cause chronic disease in some individuals, under certain conditions.

A further complication: Some so-called acute illness is really chronic. Bladder infections in cats, for instance, may flare up suddenly and be thought of as acute. In reality, the cat has a chronic disease. The distinction is important because the treatment is different. If a chronic disease is treated first with a high-potency remedy (or traditional drug) intended for an acute condition, the body may be weakened, making it more difficult to cure the underlying disease.

Acute and chronic conditions cannot be treated at the same time—the remedies interfere with one another and confuse the picture. If an animal being treated for a chronic disease suddenly receives an injury, for example, it is best to stop the chronic treatment, initiate the acute remedy, and once resolved, reinstitute the chronic regimen.

DISCOVERING HOMEOPATHY

Like most professionals who practice homeopathy in this country today, Richard Pitcairn found his way indirectly to this "alternative" method of health care. After graduating in 1965 from veterinary school at the University of California at Davis, Dr. Pitcairn went into practice for a year or so. Like others who have since embraced homeopathy, acupuncture, Chinese medicine, chiropractic therapy and other alternative modalities, Dr. Pitcairn was frustrated that his knowledge and skills were unable to cure the chronic diseases he saw everyday. Five years later, he had earned a Ph.D. in immunology/virology from Washington State University. "I chose to study immunology because I felt the immune system, with primary responsibility for fighting off disease and developing resistance, had to be essential to the recovery of health."

But in going through the progam, Dr. Pitcairn realized that he still had no practical skills to put the knowledge to use in an effective way. So when he went back into practice, he was very interested in anything that used the body's natural healing ability to restore health. "When I came across homeopathy," he says, "I discovered that a science had been worked out in exacting detail that did exactly that. It was what I had been looking for."

Unlike practitioners of alternative medicine who seem to have needed a positive personal experience with the modality before becoming "believers," Dr. Pitcairn's experience with homeopathy was the polar opposite. He took a medical complaint to a homeopath who had been recommended by a friend. The practitioner, a lay homeopath, prescribed a high-potency remedy from a compendium that was to be taken every three hours, without using the proper analysis procedures. Dr. Pitcairn's condition was not cured. In fact, he spent two weeks in bed recovering from the treatment. "I felt many changes take place in my body," he says. "At least I found out how powerful it is."

Sometimes, Dr. Pitcairn is described as a bit hardnosed about the right and the wrong way to practice homeopathy. He is said to decry, albeit without rancor, practitioners who don't do it "the way that Hahnemann taught." Probably Richard S. Pitcairn, D.V.M., Ph.D., would agree. On the face of it, he seems to have good reason. For one thing, he has been at it longer than any veterinarian in this country. His success in curing—eliminating completely—conditions that traditional medicine holds to be incurable and hopeless, speaks for itself. As surely as he knows the dedication and years of study that lie behind his own successes, he also knows that a two-week course cannot prepare a person, particularly someone who is not already a veterinarian, to practice homeopathy very well—at least not in the case of chronic disease.

Dr. Pitcairn is inclined to dismiss the claims of so-called eclectic pratitioners who claim to combine the best of different kinds of practices, including traditional veterinary medicine. "If I had taken a two-week course in acupuncture," Pitcairn says. "How could I possibly have known the best in acupuncture until I've mastered the system? What I think 'the best' means in these cases is what is easy to do."

Dr. Pitcairn and his wife Susan coordinate a busy schedule of appointments, classes and speaking engagements.

Dr. Pitcairn acknowledges that some homeopathic remedies are straightforward for particular acute illnesses, just as certain points in acupuncture and certain herbs act predictably in the presence of some common acute conditions. He does not believe complicated chronic disease lends itself to this hodge-podge approach. "When homeopathy is used this way practitioners are following the same old standard that we don't much like in allopathic medicine, namely to relieve symptoms. They are just using homeopathic remedies, acupuncture and herbs, instead of drugs and surgery. As we said before, that's not homeopathy. Homeopathy is eliminating all traces of a disease so that a state of health is restored in an animal."

Dr. Pitcairn believes that homeopathy does work well in conjunction with some manual therapies such as chiropractic. It is enhanced by a fresh, organic, mostly raw diet. Sometimes he uses mild herbs, especially externally, or flower essences. He always recommends fresh air, pure water, harmonious living conditions and other practices that soothe the spirit. Practices that conflict with homeopathy include acupuncture, Chinese medicine and powerful herbs, as well as powerful drugs and surgery—anything that has a strong effect in the body. "Homeopathy is a system of the minimal dose," he reminds us. "Prescribe just enough to initiate a curative reaction."

Any more, and you disturb things and begin to see the effect of the remedy. Practitioners and pet owners who have not yet come to terms with the time required for the body to heal itself are most likely to want to do more, unconsciously going for the spectacular results of traditional medicine. Dr. Pitcairn warns that these results are almost never cures.

OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

Dr. Pitcairn is having the best time. He has written that since "discovering" homeopathy, particularly since combining it with the restorative powers of natural nutrition, his dreams of truly curing "incurable" diseases in animals have come true in his own practice in Eugene Oregon.

There's more. Since 1992, Dr. Pitcairn has taught a year-long Professional Course in Veterinary Homeopathy. At the end of 1996, about 170 veterinarians had successfully completed this course, bringing the national total ofserious veterinary homeopathic prescribers to around 200. A far cry from when Pitcairn himself was starting out in 1978. "There may have been one or two others doing it in the United States," he recalls, "but I didn't know who they were."

Dr. Pitcairn is also preparing a repertory specifically for veterinarians. To-date, veterinarians work with a repertory for humans. While perfectly adequate, Dr. Pitcairn believes a lot of symptoms don't apply to animals. If he ever completes this long and on-going project, those symptoms will be removed, and some new ones that Pitcairn has found useful for animals included. He sees this project as a tool to make prescribing easier for veterinarians.

Finally, Dr. Pitcairn hopes that ordinary pet owners will continue to create the demand that will inspire more veterinarians to look into homeopathy. He laments the mindset of those veterinarians, thankfully a minority, who refuse to consider that homeopathy could actually work. "Here's another analogy," he says. "After Galileo had invented the telescope to study the heavens, he invited his contemporaries to look through it in order to see for themselves what seemed to evidence that overturned the common wisdom about the stars and planets. Many refused. In their minds, what he was saying could not be so; therefore they would not look. It's the same when people who have no knowledge of homeopathy insist there cannot be anything to it. The truth is, they simply don't have the conceptual framework that would allow them to understand it. But the framework exists and has for 200 years." **NP**

Marion Lane is a New York-based freelance writer who frequently contributes to pet-related publications.

How to Find a Homeopath

To locate a homeopathic veterinarian in your area, contact the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, 2214 Old Emmorton Rd., Bel Air, MD 21015; (410) 569-0795; http://altvetmed.com; the Academy for Veterinary Homeopathy, 1283 Lincoln St., Eugene, OR 97401; (541) 342-7665; the International Association for Veterinary Homeopathy, 334 Knollwood Ln., Woodstock, GA 30188; (404) 516-5954 or the National Center for Homeopathy, 801 N. Fairfax St., Ste. 306, Alexandria, VA 22314; (703) 548-7790.

Planting the Seeds

A longstanding vocal apostle for the holistic philosophy, Dr. Allen Schoen practices and preaches a balanced, integrated approach to veterinary medicine.

BY KAREN DALE DUSTMAN

Allen M. Schoen was 29 years old—and frustrated.

As a boy growing up in the urban jungle of Queens, New York, Schoen had dreamed of helping animals, particularly those others couldn't save. Now, despite a master's degree in neurophysiology and animal behavior, a doctorate of veterinary medicine from Cornell and the assistance of various specialists with whom he worked, Dr. Schoen had begun to chafe at the limitations of conventional veterinary medicine.

"There were so many animals that Western medicine didn't help," he recalls. "Chronic arthritis, liver disease, kidney disease—we don't have great answers for a lot of the chronic diseases."

Then in 1981, Schoen attended a lecture on veterinary acupuncture by pioneering researcher Shelley Altman, D.V.M. Schoen's view of medicine—and his life—would never be the same. "I said gosh, if just 10 percent of this is true, there are so many animals we can help!" he said. "That started me on my road, opening my mind that there is more to healing than just drugs and surgery."

Schoen wasted no time putting the technique to the test. One of his patients, an 11-year-old Labrador Retriever with severe arthritis, was no longer responding to conventional medical treatments. Faced with euthanizing the animal, Schoen suggested acupuncture.

"I don't know if it will work, but if you want to give acupuncture a try, there's nothing to lose," Schoen told the dog's owners. "We did, and that dog got better—much better. I said, my gosh, there is something to this. And the word spread."

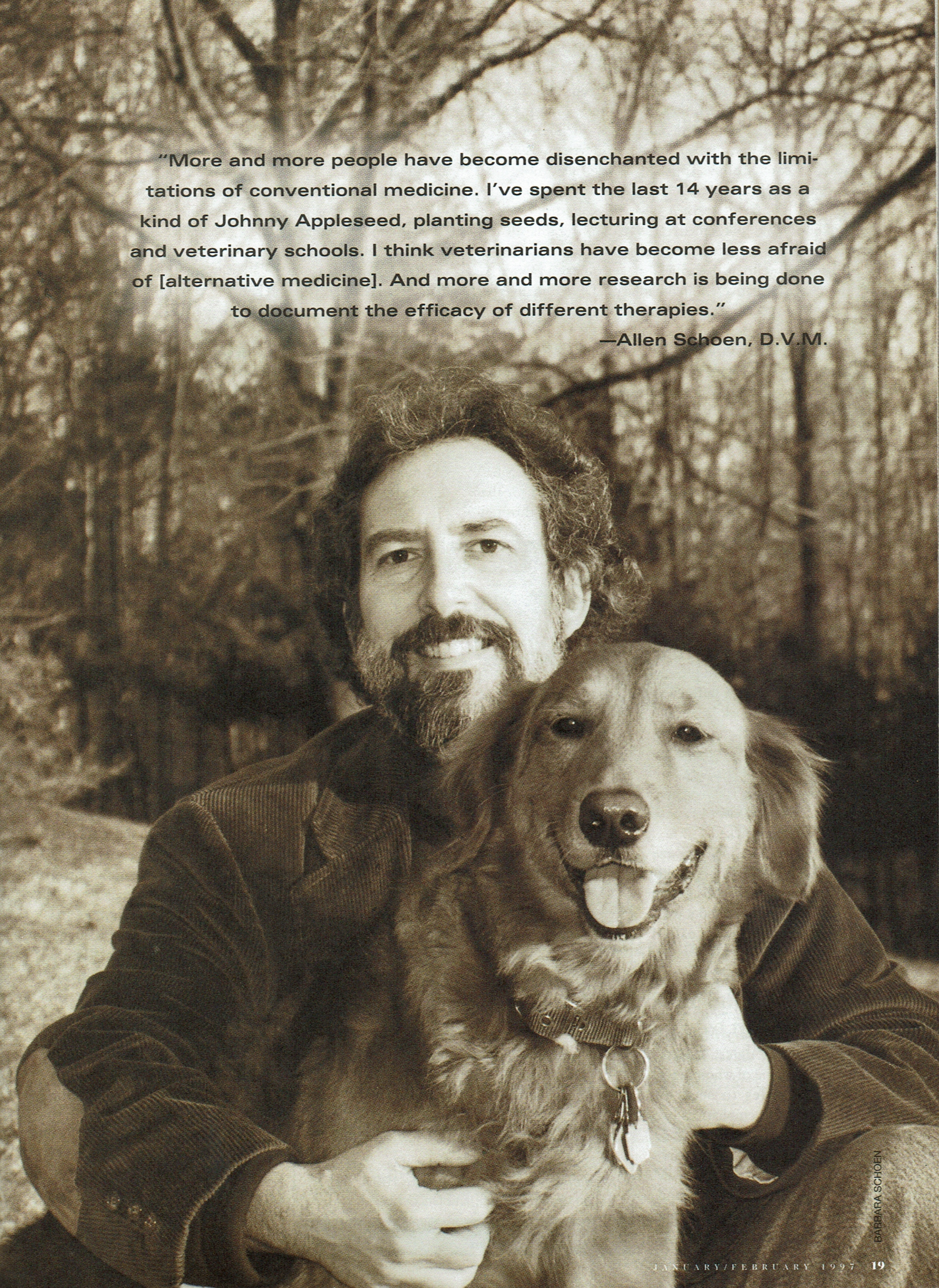
His interest aroused, Schoen stepped up his investigation of alternative medical techniques, completing a course offered by International Veterinary Acupuncture Society and studying human acupuncture. And as an associate veterinarian in the practice of Dr. Forrest Tenney, a country veterinarian whose practical repertoire included herbs and folk medicine, Schoen learned to use herbs such as uva ursi, ginger root, and buchu grass.

"To my surprise, I found it was working," says Schoen. "Once my mind opened, I started exploring Chinese herbs, homeopathy, chiropractic, nutrition. I developed a whole different perspective on animal health care. I didn't throw out Western medicine, but rather said, instead of being so ethnocentric that we think we have all the answers, why don't we take the best of all worlds and start looking at the scientific basis of these therapies."

Many of what we consider 'new' forms of therapy today have actually been around longer than Western medicine, Schoen points out. "Veterinary acupuncture dates back to about 1,100 B.C.; some of the first pictures of its use show Chinese warriors treating horses prior to battle," he notes.

But as one of only a handful of veterinarians in the early 1980s who utilized acupuncture and other forms of complementary medicine in his practice, Schoen encountered "quite a bit" of skepticism from more conventionally minded practitioners—at least until they saw results from his efforts.

"Sometimes, I get the impression that it's necessary to hit doctors and veterinarians over the head with a genuine, 24-karat miracle that simply cannot be denied before they will believe," observes Schoen in his recently published



"More and more people have become disenchanted with the limitations of conventional medicine. I've spent the last 14 years as a kind of Johnny Appleseed, planting seeds, lecturing at conferences and veterinary schools. I think veterinarians have become less afraid of [alternative medicine]. And more and more research is being done to document the efficacy of different therapies."

—Allen Schoen, D.V.M.

BARBARA SCHOEN

book, *Love, Miracles and Animal Healing*, co-written with author Pam Proctor.

For some patients, surgery or a shot of penicillin was still the most appropriate treatment. For others, however, less conventional remedies proved most useful, Schoen discovered. Acupuncture and herbs cleared up a terrier's nasal discharge after conventional approaches produced no relief. Homeopathic remedies proved helpful for asthma, chronic diarrhea and motion sickness. A cow with a gastric disorder was cured by an old folk remedy: feeding her beer. Hardly the sort of lessons one is apt to learn in veterinary school.

Today, Dr. Schoen describes his veterinary practice as "100 percent alternative/complementary." Unlike many veterinarians who specialize in either large or small animals, Dr. Schoen splits his time roughly equally. "I like them all," he says simply. "I like the variety."

Although he uses a wide range of treatment modalities, Dr. Schoen finds he often gravitates to Chinese medicine. "I guess I relate more to Chinese medicine than most things—I find different people resonate with different therapies," he explained.

In addition to his busy referral practice, Dr. Schoen has established an organization called VITA (an acronym for the Veterinary Institute for Therapeutic Alternatives), through which he conducts seminars on acupuncture and other alternative forms of therapy for animals.

"I've lectured in Australia, New Zealand, throughout Europe, Scandinavia, [and] Africa," Dr. Schoen said. "My ideas have been well-received, and I believe presentation is what makes the difference. If you're trying to knock heads and say my way is better than your way, you get antagonism. If you present it as, my main goal is to help animals and it seems only reasonable to look at all the options, then people are not feeling attacked."

In addition to *Love, Miracles and Animal Healing*, a book about his life and philosophy as a holistic veterinarian, Schoen has edited a textbook for veterinarians called *Veterinary Acupuncture: Ancient Art to Modern Medicine*, and he is working on a new text with Dr. Susan Wynn, D.V.M., *Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine*, which is due out in August, 1997.

For clients, some of whom travel hundreds of miles to seek his advice, Dr. Schoen emphasizes two basic themes. "First, nutrition is the foundation of all of preventive medicine; a good diet is essential," Schoen emphasizes. "And second, when we look at the whole picture [and] develop a program for the individual animal, sometimes that may include medicine or surgery, sometimes just homeopathy, sometimes acupuncture and herbs. Each animal is different. And the key is to be open to doing what is the best program for the individual animal."

A few practical techniques that owners can use at home may also greatly assist a pet's recovery. "Massage, stretching . . . and therapeutic acupressure have the capacity to work hand-in-glove with traditional veterinary medicine, or even to heal diseases or conditions that traditional techniques can't handle," he noted in his book, *Love, Miracles and Animal Healing*. "And the regular physical contact that these programs require can do wonders to cement the bond between you and your pet."

As avant-garde as his message may have seemed more than a decade ago, the veterinary community has become more receptive in recent years, says Schoen. "More and more people have become disenchanted with the limitations of conventional medicine," Schoen observed. "I've spent the last 14 years as a kind of Johnny Appleseed, planting seeds, lecturing at conferences and veterinary schools. I think veterinarians have become less afraid of [alternative medicine]. And more and more research is being done to document the efficacy of different therapies."

What lies ahead? Alternative and complementary medicine will become even more mainstream—a change that should greatly improve the range of medical options available for animals, Schoen predicts. "My vision for the future of animal health care is that we take the best of all the different approaches to develop a new, integrated approach to animal health. I believe in the future there will be specialists in different areas of alternative medicine, just as there are today in [conventional] medicine and surgery, and veterinarians will be open to referring to whatever is best for the individual animal," he said. "That way, we will have much better health care for the animals."

Asked how he balances his busy schedule, Schoen just laughs. "Balance?" he chuckles. "There may be variety, but I'd hardly say balance!"

He pauses thoughtfully for a moment. "Periodically, when I'm off somewhere teaching I'll just disappear and go into nature," he adds. "That's what heals me the most." **NP**

Karen Dale Dustman is a Northern California-based freelance writer who frequently contributes to Natural Pet *magazine.*

SEMINAR INFO

VITA sponsors weekend introductory seminars on acupuncture and alternative therapies for veterinarians and the lay public throughout the world. For further information or a free brochure, call or write:

Veterinary Institute for Therapeutic Alternatives (VITA)
15 Sunset Terrace
Sherman, CT 06784
(860) 354-2287
Fax: (860) 350-3482

BOOKS BY DR. SCHOEN

Love, Miracles and Animal Healing, by Dr. Schoen and Pam Proctor, a book about his life and philosophy as a holistic veterinarian. (Simon and Schuster;1995; $22.)

Veterinary Acupuncture: Ancient Art to Modern Medicine, a textbook for veterinarians, edited by Dr. Schoen.

Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine, due out in August, 1997, by Dr. Susan Wynn, D.V.M., and Dr. Schoen.